



City Manager's

# COVID-19 RESPONSE UPDATE

Friday, January 8, 2021

*City Manager Dee Williams-Ridley provided this update on the City of Berkeley's COVID-19 response to the City Council. The reports, which are issued regularly, can be viewed at [cityofberkeley.info/covid19-city-manager-updates](http://cityofberkeley.info/covid19-city-manager-updates).*

## Historic distribution of vaccines starts

We, along with health officers from around the region, [align with the state's vaccine distribution guidelines](#), which currently prioritize health care workers. Vaccines are being distributed through multiple channels:

- Hospital systems, such as the Alta Bates Summit Medical Center, get vaccines directly to administer to staff. (Alta Bates Summit received and started to administer their 975 doses in mid-December)
- A federal program using CVS/Walgreens will administer vaccines to residents of participating skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, and similar long-term care settings for older or medically vulnerable individuals
- University Health Services, the health service for the University, operates across multiple jurisdictions and will administer their own supply.
- Many people who live or work in the City are vaccinated through their employer or health care provider outside the City.

We have re-assigned staff across all City departments to quickly and systematically administer the doses we receive to the groups identified in the state plan. This has allowed us to request the maximum possible allowed for our population size. As of Jan. 8, Berkeley Public Health has administered 797 of the 1,100 doses we have received with the rest administered next week.

The federal government has purchased and plans to purchase enough vaccines for everyone to get vaccinated for free. Even though the development and distribution of vaccines are moving forward on an unprecedented pace and scale, supplies depend on factors outside of city, state and federal control. As a result, specific timelines are not possible. As supplies increase, we and all others administering vaccines will continue to move through the phases outlined by the state. Doses for the general public may start by summer.

It's important to note that the vaccine is not panacea. We need to use [all the tools the CDC has identified to fight this pandemic](#), especially considering how hospitals



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are being overwhelmed with cases during this surge. We all – even those who are vaccinated – need to wear masks and avoid gatherings. Many people remain vulnerable. Each time someone wears a mask, avoids a gathering, keeps distance from other households or gets a vaccine, those acts help protect our community.

For more information, see our vaccine page at [cityofberkeley.info/covid19-vaccine](https://cityofberkeley.info/covid19-vaccine).

## Regional Stay at Home Order extended

COVID-19 cases continue to rapidly escalate in Berkeley, the county and throughout the region, straining hospitals and keeping state “stay home” restrictions until intensive care units are freed up.

The impact in the region is broad: hospital intensive care units only have 3 percent of capacity remaining. But the impact of the staggering surge can be seen in Berkeley alone:

- There have been a thousand new cases in the last two months – equaling the tally of the previous eight months combined.
- There have been 6 reported deaths in the last two weeks – compared to 9 deaths in almost all of 2020.
- The City had 68 reported cases on Tuesday, the highest single day tally of the pandemic.

The nature of the virus means that the worst is yet to come. The impact of holiday and New Year's gatherings are not yet completely felt. The narrow path forward – and one required by the state's Stay Home order – is that everyone stay home for all but essential tasks.

ICU capacity is one of the final impacts of a cascading set of events set in motion by this virus. Many infected people have no symptoms, making it seem benign, but nonetheless [account for 50 percent of all COVID-19 infections nationwide](#). This quick spread casts a net so wide that just those with severe illness now leave the entire state's ICU capacity at [0 percent capacity](#).

We each may be unknowing carriers and spreaders. We also each hold the power to control the spread. We urge everyone in our community to stay home except for essential needs, avoid gatherings, and be vigilant about masks and distancing when outside their home.



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For more information, see the [message we sent to community members](#) and our [Stay Home order page](#).

## Get tested: City expanding testing options

Testing is an essential part of our response, helping identify cases for a virus that spreads easily. Along with recognition of [COVID-19 symptoms](#), tests help identify when to isolate and quarantine. We also know that protective actions – such as staying home, wearing face coverings, avoiding crowds and keeping six feet from those not in your household – are essential because the virus may not be detected by *any* test for two weeks. People can get tested too early after exposure and become positive at a later point, unknowingly spreading it to others

We are aware of FDA's [safety message about Curative](#) and, like other jurisdictions, we have reached out to the company and the state to get more information.

If anyone is concerned about a particular test approach, we offer [other options as a City](#) and many more are available through the region or through their health care providers. We recommend that people talk to their doctor about individual diagnostic decisions. In the coming weeks, we are also offering more testing sites throughout Berkeley using Optum, a state-funded partner.

- Tuesday, January 12, *Allston Way, between MLK & Milvia*
- Wednesday, January 13, *Berkeley Bowl, 2020 Oregon St.*
- Tuesday, January 19, *Harold Way, between Kittredge and Allston*
- Wednesday, January 20, *Berkeley Bowl West, 920 Heinz Ave.*

People can [make an appointment online](#). Scheduling for events on January 19 and 20 will open on January 11.

A single negative test result does not mean a person is not infected with the virus. People should not use a negative test to gather or loosen the public health actions that are essential to keeping our community safe during this unprecedented surge. Anyone who tests positive, has been told by a doctor that they are presumed positive, has COVID-19 symptoms or has symptoms after being exposed to a test-positive case within the past two weeks [should take immediate action to isolate](#). Those who are exposed should [quarantine](#).



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## Quarantine more important during surge

Earlier this week, we asked community members who traveled outside the Bay Area, spent time with travelers from elsewhere, or gathered with people outside their household over winter holidays to [quarantine at home for 10 days](#) to avoid spreading COVID-19 to others.

It's a good idea to quarantine after:

- Gathering with people you do not normally live with - especially if you were indoors, less than 6 feet apart, or around anyone not wearing a face mask.
- Travelling outside the region - especially on planes, buses, trains, or other shared vehicles.

These activities, which mix multiple households, pose a higher risk of exposure now than at earlier points in the pandemic - both because the virus is more widespread in our community, but also because a new, more easily-spreading variant has been confirmed to be circulating in California.

We recently updated our [Quarantine Health Order](#) to align with new state recommendations for a shortened quarantine period. While a full 14 day quarantine is safest, a 10-day quarantine is now permitted. It's still important to monitor symptoms for 14 days. Watch for fever, cough, shortness of breath, and [other symptoms of COVID-19](#). Find more information at [cityofberkeley.info/quarantine](http://cityofberkeley.info/quarantine).

## Close public health work with Golden Gate Fields slows outbreak

Containing an outbreak requires focusing on universally accepted, core public health principles, including testing, isolation of those who test positive, and quarantine of those who were exposed to someone with COVID-19. Measures were also added to prevent spread outside of the testing process, including increased use of PPE and physical distancing.

We also worked closely with them to develop a joint statement.

In early May, after a month-long closure, Golden Gate Fields (GGF) reopened for live racing under strict COVID-19 protocols. Those protocols – developed in consultation with an on-site physician and the Alameda County Public Health Department – included the following:



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- The elimination of fans, owners, press and non-essential visitors from the track.
- Controlled access to the stable area with temperature and symptom screening.
- Enhanced PPE requirements including mandatory mask-wearing.
- Scaled-back and revised on-track activities that reduced the number of required personnel and increased the ability of those on-site to socially distance.
- Required isolation of any individual who tested positive for COVID-19.
- Required testing for individuals displaying COVID-19 symptoms.
- Closing of indoor communal areas such as cafeterias and rec rooms.
- Enhanced disinfection and sanitation measures.

For over 6 months, GGF, like many other racetracks, conducted live racing in accordance with the requirements established by the State of California. However, an outbreak occurred at GGF in early November.

Upon identification of the outbreak, GGF provided off-site housing and support for workers who needed to be isolated after testing positive. City of Berkeley Public Health staff conducted a site-visit and provided test kits within 48 hours of the positive test results and GGF cooperated in implementing new safety protocols including suspending live racing. That suspension is still ongoing. In addition, in close consultation with City of Berkeley Public Health and the California Department of Public Health, GGF took comprehensive steps to stem the outbreak, including the following:

- Over 100 personnel who had not tested positive for COVID-19 were removed from the track and asked to quarantine off-site for more than 3 weeks both to protect their own health and to prevent transmission on-site.
- Twice-weekly COVID-19 testing was performed for the quarantined group.
- Temporary off-site housing and meals were provided for many in the quarantined group.
- Enhanced protective measures were implemented for essential personnel caring for the horses, including N95 masks and twice-weekly COVID-19 testing.
- Temporary restroom facilities were added to each barn along with additional handwashing stations.



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These steps were successful in slowing the outbreak. Over the last 3 weeks, the number of on-site personnel testing positive for COVID-19 has significantly decreased. As a result, in consultation with City of Berkeley Public Health, GGF has begun a phased return of the quarantined group and is currently updating its protocols to resume live racing and ensure the ongoing safety of workers at the facility. In addition, GGF has agreed to continue COVID-19 testing every three days of returning workers who have not tested positive and all others who are at risk of COVID-19 transmission at the facility. Any individuals testing positive for COVID-19 will be isolated and any of their close contacts will be required to quarantine off-site per local and state guidelines.

## **Business grant program deadline approaching**

Small businesses impacted by COVID-19 may be eligible for \$5,000-\$25,000 through the State's [CA Relief Grant](#) program. The deadline to apply has been extended to January 13.

More information is available at [CAreliefGrant.com](https://CAreliefGrant.com), which includes detailed application guides for [businesses](#) and [non-profit organizations](#).